

What is claimed is:

1. A method for providing information on commodities to a user by using a computer, comprising the
5 steps of:

(a) acquiring commodity-comparison information indicating at least one result of at least one comparison between said commodities;

(b) storing said commodity-comparison
10 information acquired in step (a);

(c) producing a commodity-comparison map which visually indicates at least one relationship between said commodities by using said commodity-comparison information stored in step (b) in such a manner that at least one
15 coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map corresponds to at least one evaluation criterion used in evaluation of said commodities, respectively;

(d) producing relative-evaluation information which indicates at least one relative evaluation of said
20 commodities by using said commodity-comparison map; and

(e) providing said relative-evaluation information to the user.

2. A method for providing information on
25 commodities to a user by using a computer, comprising the steps of:

(a) acquiring commodity-comparison information

indicating at least one result of at least one comparison between said commodities, from at least one first terminal through a communication means;

(b) storing in a storage device said
5 commodity-comparison information acquired in step (a);

(c) producing a commodity-comparison map which visually indicates at least one relationship between said commodities by using said commodity-comparison information stored in said storage device in such a manner that at
10 least one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map corresponds to at least one first evaluation criterion used in evaluation of said commodities, respectively;

(d) producing relative-evaluation information which indicates at least one relative evaluation of said
15 commodities by using said commodity-comparison map; and

(e) transmitting said relative-evaluation information to one of at least one second terminal through a communication means.

20 3. A method according to claim 2, wherein said relative-evaluation information is arranged for display of said commodity-comparison map on said one of the at least one second terminal.

25 4. A method according to claim 2, further comprising the step of;

(f) acquiring possessed-commodity information

which indicates at least one first commodity possessed by said user; and

said commodity-comparison map is produced in step (c) in such a manner that said commodity-comparison map visually indicates information on at least one feature in which at least one second commodity is superior to one of said at least one first commodity, at least one relationship between said one of said at least one first commodity and said at least one second commodity is indicated by locations of the one of the at least one first commodity and the at least one second commodity in the commodity-comparison map, and said at least one feature respectively corresponds to said at least one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map.

5. A method according to claim 4, wherein said relative-evaluation information is arranged for display of information on said at least one second commodity and said at least one feature on said one of the at least one second terminal.

6. A method according to claim 2, further comprising the step of;

(g) acquiring evaluation-criterion-selection information which indicates at least one second evaluation criterion, from said one of the at least one second terminal through a communication means; and

said commodity-comparison map is produced in step (c) in such a manner that said at least one second evaluation criterion corresponds to said at least one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map, respectively.

7. A method according to claim 2, further comprising the steps of:

(h) acquiring evaluation-criterion-selection information which indicates at least one second evaluation criterion, from said at least one second terminal through a communication means;

(i) storing in a storage device said evaluation-criterion-selection information acquired in said step (h);

(j) obtaining aggregate statistics of the evaluation-criterion-selection information stored in said step (h); and

(k) transmitting said aggregate statistics to said one of the at least one second terminal through a communication means.

8. A method according to claim 2, wherein said relative-evaluation information includes said commodity-comparison map and information on sales amounts of said commodities indicated in the commodity-comparison map.

9. A method according to claim 2, wherein said step
(c) comprises the substeps of:

(c1) defining at least one virtual force
acting on at least one edge each of which has a direction
5 indicating at least one relationship between said
commodities, so as to control the direction of the at
least one edge;

(c2) generating a virtual physical model
representing said commodities and said at least one
10 relative evaluation of the commodities and having said
virtual force incorporated therein; and

(c3) producing said commodity-comparison map
by obtaining a stable state of said virtual physical
model.

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10. A commodity-information provision apparatus for
providing information on commodities to a user,
comprising:

a comparison-information acquisition unit
20 which acquires commodity-comparison information indicating
at least one result of at least one comparison between
said commodities, from at least one first terminal through
a communication means;

a storage unit which stores said commodity-
25 comparison information acquired by the comparison-
information acquisition unit;

a commodity-comparison-map production unit

which produces a commodity-comparison map which visually indicates at least one relationship between said commodities by using said commodity-comparison information stored in said storage unit in such a manner that at least
5 one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map corresponds to at least one evaluation criterion used in evaluation of said commodities, respectively;

a relative-evaluation-information production unit which produces relative-evaluation information which
10 indicates at least one relative evaluation of said commodities by using said commodity-comparison map; and

a transmission unit which transmits said relative-evaluation information to one of at least one second terminal through a communication means.

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11. A method for utilizing information on commodities, which is provided to a user by using a computer, comprising the steps of:

(a) acquiring, by a terminal, relative-
20 evaluation information through a communication means, where the relative-evaluation information indicates at least one relative evaluation of said commodities by using a commodity-comparison map which visually indicates at least one relationship between said commodities in such a
25 manner that at least one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map corresponds to at least one evaluation criterion used in evaluation of said

commodities, respectively; and

(b) displaying said relative-evaluation information on said terminal.

5 12. A terminal for utilizing information on commodities, which is provided to a user by using a computer, comprising:

 a relative-evaluation-information acquisition unit which acquires relative-evaluation information
10 through a communication means, where the relative-evaluation information indicates at least one relative evaluation of said commodities by using a commodity-comparison map which visually indicates at least one relationship between said commodities in such a manner
15 that at least one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map corresponds to at least one evaluation criterion used in evaluation of said commodities, respectively; and

 a display unit which displays said relative-
20 evaluation information.

 13. A system for providing information on commodities to a user, comprising:

 at least one first terminal;

25 a commodity-information provision apparatus;
 and

 at least one second terminal;

each of said at least one first terminal includes,

a comparison-information reception unit which receives commodity-comparison information indicating at least one result of at least one comparison between said commodities, and

a comparison-information transmission unit which transmits said commodity-comparison information to said commodity-information provision apparatus through a first communication means;

said commodity-information provision apparatus includes,

a comparison-information acquisition unit which acquires said commodity-comparison information from said at least one first terminal through said first communication means,

a storage unit which stores said commodity-comparison information acquired by the comparison-information acquisition unit,

a commodity-comparison-map production unit which produces a commodity-comparison map which visually indicates at least one relationship between said commodities by using said commodity-comparison information stored in said storage unit in such a manner that at least one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map corresponds to at least one evaluation criterion used in evaluation of said commodities, respectively,

a relative-evaluation-information
production unit which produces relative-evaluation
information which indicates at least one relative
evaluation of said commodities by using said commodity-
5 comparison map, and

a relative-evaluation-information
transmission unit which transmits said relative-evaluation
information to one of said at least one second terminal
through a second communication means; and
10 each of said at least one second terminal
includes,

a relative-evaluation-information
acquisition unit which acquires said relative-evaluation
information from said commodity-information provision
15 apparatus through said second communication means, and

a display unit which displays said
relative-evaluation information.

14. A computer-readable storage medium storing a
20 program which makes a computer execute a method for
providing information on commodities to a user, said
method comprising the steps of:

(a) acquiring commodity-comparison information
indicating at least one result of at least one comparison
25 between said commodities, from at least one first terminal
through a communication means;

(b) storing in a storage device said

commodity-comparison information acquired in step (a);

(c) producing a commodity-comparison map which visually indicates at least one relationship between said commodities by using said commodity-comparison information
5 stored in said storage device in such a manner that at least one coordinate axis of said commodity-comparison map corresponds to at least one first evaluation criterion used in evaluation of said commodities, respectively;

(d) producing relative-evaluation information
10 which indicates at least one relative evaluation of said commodities by using said commodity-comparison map; and

(e) transmitting said relative-evaluation information to one of at least one second terminal through a communication means.

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15. A method for providing information on commodities to a user by using a computer, comprising the steps of:

(a) acquiring commodity-comment information
20 indicating at least one comment said commodities, from at least one first terminal through a communication means;

(b) storing in a storage device said commodity-comment information acquired in step (a);

(c) acquiring from a second terminal through a
25 communication means commodity-selection information indicating at least one of said commodities;

(d) extracting from said storage device a

portion of said commodity-comment information corresponding to said at least one of said commodities;

(e) producing a keyword map visually indicating said portion of the commodity-comment
5 information and said at least one of said commodities; and

(f) transmitting information arranged for display of said keyword map on said second terminal, to the second terminal through a communication means.

10 16. An apparatus for providing information on commodities to a user, comprising:

a commodity-comment-information acquisition unit which acquires commodity-comment information indicating at least one comment said commodities, from at
15 least one first terminal through a communication means;

a storage unit which stores in a storage device said commodity-comment information acquired by said commodity-comment-information acquisition unit;

a commodity-selection information acquisition
20 unit which acquires from a second terminal through a communication means commodity-selection information indicating at least one of said commodities;

a selected-information extraction unit which extracts from said storage device a portion of said
25 commodity-comment information corresponding to said at least one of said commodities;

a keyword-map production unit which producing

a keyword map visually indicating said portion of the commodity-comment information and said at least one of said commodities; and

a transmission unit which transmits
5 information arranged for display of said keyword map on said second terminal, to the second terminal through a communication means.

17. A computer-readable storage medium storing a
10 program which makes a computer execute a method for providing information on commodities to a user, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) acquiring commodity-comment information indicating at least one comment said commodities, from at
15 least one first terminal through a communication means;

(b) storing in a storage device said commodity-comment information acquired in step (a);

(c) acquiring from a second terminal through a communication means commodity-selection information
20 indicating at least one of said commodities;

(c) extracting from said storage device a portion of said commodity-comment information corresponding to said at least one of said commodities;

(d) producing a keyword map visually
25 indicating said portion of the commodity-comment information and said at least one of said commodities; and

(e) transmitting information arranged for

display of said keyword map on said second terminal, to
the second terminal through a communication means.